

AI-Mediated Cognition: Canonical FAQ

An ongoing exploration of how AI systems reshape cognition, memory, interpretation, and meaning under conditions of recursive interaction and mediated thought.

Part of the Reality Drift framework by A. Jacobs

Introduction

AI systems are beginning to change not only what people know, but how thought itself is structured, externalized, and stabilized. Many people already feel this shift before having language for it.

In most cases, the change does not feel dramatic. Thinking simply starts unfolding differently. Ideas emerge through interaction rather than entirely beforehand. Memory shifts toward retrieval and re-access. Interpretation becomes more iterative, recursive, and externally distributed across human and computational systems.

This document explores those changes through the Reality Drift framework terminology, including Co-Cognition, Cognitive Drift, recursive compression, semantic fidelity, and externalized cognition.

Why does thinking with AI feel different?

Thinking with AI often feels different because the system does more than return information. It can structure partial thoughts, reflect them back in clearer language, and provide material for the next stage of reasoning.

This creates a form of Co-Cognition, a recursive interaction loop in which thought develops across both the person and the system. Instead of cognition remaining entirely internal, parts of reasoning become externalized into prompts, outputs, summaries, and reinterpretations that are continuously reintegrated back into thought.

The result is that thinking can feel faster, more iterative, and more fluid than ordinary internal reasoning.

Why does ChatGPT sometimes feel like part of my thinking?

Because the system increasingly participates in the structure of cognition itself rather than functioning only as a retrieval tool.

A person may begin with an incomplete thought, receive a structured representation back, and then continue reasoning from that representation. Over time, this creates a distributed cognitive loop in which interpretation unfolds across internal cognition and external systems simultaneously.

This is closely related to distributed cognition and the idea of the exocortex, where memory, synthesis, and reasoning partially extend beyond the biological mind into persistent external systems.

Can AI change how people think?

Yes, especially when interaction becomes repeated, immersive, and recursive.

AI systems can gradually influence how ideas are structured, how language is organized, how quickly interpretations form, and how memory is externalized. Over time, cognition may depend more on retrieval, re-access, and external synthesis than on internal retention alone.

This does not necessarily mean cognition becomes worse. In many cases it becomes faster, more compressed, and more synthesis-oriented. But repeated interaction can also increase drift risk if internal models update faster than meaning can stabilize. Within the Reality Drift framework, this is where Cognitive Drift begins to emerge.

Why do I feel mentally dependent on AI tools?

Dependence can emerge when AI begins handling too much of the structuring, synthesis, retrieval, or interpretation that cognition previously managed internally.

This is cognitive outsourcing. It can expand capacity, but it can also create cognitive debt when outputs are used faster than they are fully integrated into understanding.

Co-Cognition names the loop. Cognitive Drift names the misalignment that can emerge when internal models become harder to stabilize without continuous external support.

Why does AI make writing feel easier?

AI systems are unusually effective at semantic scaffolding. They can rapidly organize partial ideas into coherent language structures, reducing the friction between thought and expression.

This often creates a feeling of synthetic fluency, where language arrives with a level of clarity, polish, or coherence that exceeds the user's own internal formulation of the idea.

Over time, this can subtly reshape writing itself. Language may become more compressed, structurally optimized, and increasingly similar across contexts as people adapt to interacting with systems trained on large-scale statistical patterns of language.

Why does my internal monologue feel different after using AI?

Repeated interaction with AI systems can reshape the structure of interpretation itself.

Thought becomes increasingly recursive. Outputs are not only consumed, but reintegrated into future cognition. The system reflects language, assumptions, patterns, and unresolved frames back to the user in increasingly structured form.

This is the Mirror Effect: AI amplifies and stabilizes aspects of a user's own cognitive structure through continuous interaction.

The result can feel like cognition becoming more externally mirrored, iterative, and self-referential over time.

Is AI weakening human memory?

Not exactly. But it is changing what memory is asked to do.

As cognition becomes more distributed, people increasingly remember how to retrieve, reconstruct, and re-access information rather than storing everything internally. Memory shifts toward externalized systems and persistent retrieval environments.

This does not eliminate intelligence or understanding. It changes the balance between retention, retrieval, synthesis, and integration.

This is externalized cognition. Memory becomes less like a private archive and more like an active interface between the person, the system, and the information environment.

Why does cognition feel more fragmented now?

Because modern informational environments increasingly operate through continuous updates, compressed representations, unresolved inputs, algorithmic filtering, and persistent informational velocity.

Under these conditions, cognition adapts by becoming more iterative and continuously updated. But when interpretation changes faster than meaning can stabilize, coherence and long-term integration become harder to maintain.

This is the environment in which Cognitive Drift emerges.

What is Cognitive Drift?

Cognitive Drift describes the gradual misalignment between internal mental models and the realities those models are meant to represent.

It emerges when cognition operates in environments where information changes faster than meaning can stabilize. As information accelerates and contexts fragment, mental models must continuously recalibrate, weakening coherence, orientation, and long-term integration over time.

Within the broader Reality Drift framework, Cognitive Drift names what drift feels like at the level of individual thought, memory, attention, and interpretation.

The Transition

AI is becoming part of the everyday infrastructure of thought. People use it to write, search, remember, plan, explain, and make sense of information that would otherwise remain scattered.

The deeper shift is not that people stop thinking. It is that more cognition becomes distributed across internal memory, external tools, and AI systems that structure information back to the user.

Origin & Relationship to Reality Drift

The Cognitive Drift and Co-Cognition terminology were developed by A. Jacobs between 2023 and 2026 as part of the broader Reality Drift project examining cognition, semantic stability, AI-mediated reasoning, recursive informational environments, and the structural conditions shaping modern thought.

Reality Drift describes how systems lose alignment with the realities they are intended to represent as optimization, abstraction, and representation layers accumulate. Cognitive Drift examines how those same pressures appear at the level of human cognition, where internal models become harder to stabilize as information changes faster than meaning can integrate.

Keywords: *co-cognition, cognitive drift, AI-mediated cognition, distributed cognition, exocortex, cognitive outsourcing, cognitive debt, semantic scaffolding, recursive thinking, recursive compression, AI and memory externalization, AI changes how people think, human AI cognition loop, synthetic fluency, mirror effect, externalized cognition, semantic fidelity, AI cognitive scaffolding, Reality Drift framework, A. Jacobs*

Core Framework and Resources

- [Substack \(Articles\)](#)
- [GitHub \(Full Library\)](#)
- [DOI \(Research Paper\)](#)
- [Glossary & Definition](#)